

Keeping Our Spiritual House In Order For The Coming Of The Lord.

Text: 2 Cor 13:5-14

Suggested Hymns:

487, 497

- 1) Are you in the faith?
- 2) Doing the Lord's business
- 3) Weak but strong
- 4) Striving for perfection
- 5) Showing Christian love and fellowship

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is 2 Corinthians 13:5-14, ⁵ *Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?* ⁶ *But I trust that ye shall know that we are not reprobates.*

⁷ *Now I pray to God that ye do no evil; not that we should appear approved, but that ye should do that which is honest, though we be as reprobates.* ⁸ *For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth.* ⁹ *For we are glad, when we are weak, and ye are strong: and this also we wish, even your perfection.* ¹⁰ *Therefore I write these things being absent, lest being present I should use sharpness, according to the power which the Lord hath given me to edification, and not to destruction.*

¹¹ *Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you.* ¹² *Greet one another with an holy kiss.* ¹³ *All the saints salute you.* ¹⁴ *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen. (KJV)*

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Today we are observing the last Sunday in Trinity, the last Sunday in the church year. With the first Sunday in Advent we shall begin a new year of grace.

The last Sunday in the church year lends itself to many different purposes for the Christian.

The Introit reminds us to think of the wonderful thoughts God has toward us, thoughts of peace and not of evil, and to prove this, He has been favourable to our land in many ways.

The Collect asks God to absolve His people from their offences and deliver them through His bountiful goodness in Jesus Christ. The Epistle instructs the believers about the coming of the Lord on the Last Day, all of which moves them to be wide awake. As watchful and alert soldiers of Christ they are to have ‘faith and love’ for a breastplate and ‘the hope of salvation’ for a helmet. If any in the ranks should become weak or fearful, he is to be edified and comforted by his fellow travellers.

The Gospel is that well-known parable in which Jesus likens the kingdom of heaven to 10 virgins. Every time we hear this, we cannot but pray, *“Lord, keep me wise and watchful.”*

Let us therefore consider keeping our spiritual house in order for the coming of the Lord. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Are You In The Faith?

For the Christian the coming of the Lord Jesus has no terrors, because it is the day of his salvation. It is the day of his going home, of his march of victory. Nevertheless, he always keeps his house in order, because he does not know when the Lord will come.

Our text wants to show us how to keep our spiritual house in order for the coming of the Lord, whether that be on the Last Day or the day of our departure from this world through temporal death.

The first thing our text tells the believers is, *“Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves.”*

How can I do this, you may ask? Paul gives the answer when he says, *“Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you except ye be reprobates?”* If someone is a reprobate it means that he is disqualified, rejected or unfit.

The things you believe about Jesus Christ will tell you whether you are in the faith or not. When you are asked by Jesus, as He once asked His disciples, ***“But whom say ye that I am?”*** and can answer, ***“Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God,”*** then you are in the faith.

When you hear the wonderful story of the Father’s love in His Son Jesus Christ and all the things He did through Him for our salvation, climaxing in His crucifixion and resurrection, and Jesus asks, ***“Do you believe these things?”*** and you cry out with tears in your eyes, ***“Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief,”*** then you are in the faith.

When you have stood by the grave of one of your loved ones and heard the pastor say, ***“Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust, in the hope of the resurrection to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ,”*** and you leave that grave with the triumph song of Job ringing in your ears, ***“I know that my Redeemer lives,”*** then you are in the faith.

We are living in an unbelieving generation, a generation that lives by the slogan, ***“Let us eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die.”*** We are living in an era when the love of money has become the root of all evil. This makes it all the more important to examine ourselves frequently whether we are actually in the faith.

2. Doing The Lord’s Business.

While the Christian is waiting for the coming of his Lord, he is not sitting idly by with his hands folded in his lap. He is about the Lord’s business doing what is honest according to the truth of God’s Word.

We read in the text, ***“Now I pray to God that ye do no evil; not that we should appear approved but that ye should do that which is honest, though we be as reprobates. For we can do nothing against the truth but for the truth.”*** Nothing makes a person feel better than to have the conviction that he is doing the right thing. The Christian, knowing the truth of God’s Word and having anchored his faith in that Word, is free from the errors and confusion of this world’s wisdom.

The Christian has his trouble with the flesh, to be sure, but he knows that the things of the flesh, no matter how enticing they may seem, are things which are

forbidden by God in the 10 Commandments. The works of the flesh are disapproved of by God, because they do not fit into the truth. They are opposed to one another.

And so, like a good workman who does not need to be ashamed, the Christian is working day by day, knowing that the night will come when no man can work.

The Christian is like the sun, of which the psalmist says¹ that he, like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, rejoices as a strong man to run a race. And so he will be blessed when the Master comes, because he was found about his Father's business.

3. Weak But Strong

Although the Christian stands in the faith and is running his race according to the truth of God's Word, he is still living in a sinful world, beset in front and behind with the devil, the world, and his own flesh. But in spite of his own weakness, in spite of the enemy forces which he encounters day by day, he knows that there will be an end to these things. He knows that he shall obtain the victory, and so he is glad and strong in the Lord. The text states it this way, ***“For we are glad when we are weak and ye are strong.”***

This sounds rather contradictory. Who is glad when he is weak? And who is strong when he is weak? Only the Christian can speak in this way and he knows why.

The Christian is glad in his weakness, because he knows that the power of God must work in him. He is strong in his weakness because the power of God is working through his weakness. Only the Christian can understand this, because he realises and experiences it every day, especially so as the end approaches.

Many a time he finds himself going to God as did St. Paul, asking Him to remove some thorn in the flesh, only to receive the same answer which Paul received, ***“My grace is sufficient for thee, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.”***

And what does the Christian say when he receives this answer from God? What Paul said, ***“Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities that***

the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then am I strong."² The Christian, waiting for the coming of the Lord, is the weakest person in the world if he is standing in himself; but he is the strongest person in the world if he is standing in the power of God.

4. Striving For Perfection

In this strange combination of being the strongest person in the world while he is the weakest, the Christian waiting for his Good Shepherd's coming to take him home keeps on striving toward perfection.

St. Paul expresses it this way in our text, "*And this also we wish, even your perfection.*" The word perfection here means being thoroughly adjusted. In our mechanised world we have learned to appreciate how important it is (from the tiniest electrical gadget in our home to the latest aircraft) that every thing be thoroughly and perfectly adjusted.

It is adjustment or alignment that brings about perfection. In a certain sense the Christian is constantly in a space-craft. He is only a pilgrim and a stranger in this world, because he is headed for heaven. How happy is the person who has as the Pilot of his life none else than the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the salvation of God's people and He cannot make a mistake.

Every day the Christian experiences what Paul once wrote to the Philippians, "*Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect; but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended; but this one thing I do: forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.*"³

In his striving for perfection the Christian knows only too well how much he needs training, for he too is a runner attaining a crown, not a corruptible one but one that is everlasting. Therefore he stands ready to be reprimanded, even sharply when he misses the mark in the contest. Our text puts it like this, "*Therefore I write these things, being absent, lest being present I should use sharpness according to the power which the Lord hath given me to edification and not to destruction.*"

The Christian sees many things in this world that are as enticing to him as to his fellowmen, but they do not fit into his training program to be ready when the Lord shall appear.

There is money, for example; he knows it is a wonderful means to attain certain ends when it is used with sanctification and prayer. But when money becomes an idol it becomes the root of all evil and drowns people in destruction and perdition.

He too is tempted to covet after it, but his Trainer Christ has shown him that if he does he will err from the faith and pierce himself through with many sorrows. This will cause him to fall by the wayside and lose the race.

Realising the odds but also realising the tremendous prize for which he is running, the Christian, as Paul says in another place, runs the race with determination. He is not like a shadow-boxer but one who is really in the fight and for that purpose becomes the sternest master over his body.

This he does because he knows the Master will come soon and give him a crown, not of fading leaves or bronze or silver or even gold, but his crown is eternal and consists of mansions prepared by the Lord Himself for all who love His appearing. So he welcomes the rugged training instructions of his Master Jesus, even when they are sharp, because they are meant for his edification, to build him up, to keep him strong, and to make him a winner.

5. Showing Christian Love And Fellowship

But now what will the Christian do until his Lord comes and he is delivered from all evil and translated into the realms of glory? He follows a pattern of Christian love and fellowship in his local congregation.

We read at the close of our text, *“Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints salute you.”*

Being *“of good comfort”* means that the Christians have Someone whom they may call alongside to help them. What a beautiful picture of joy and help! The Holy Spirit, the Comforter, God with the Father and the Son, may be called alongside to help at any time.

Our Trainer, Christ, does not sit on the bench while we run the race, but He sends the Holy Spirit with us on the track, and when our strength or courage sinks He supports us with His omnipotent power. When our sight grows dim and our goal can no longer be clearly seen, He opens our eyes to see clearly the mansions set before us. With such help the Christian cannot lose. With the apostle Paul he triumphantly sings, ***“I can do all things through Christ, which strengtheneth me.”***⁴

The Christian is greatly strengthened in his fellow Christians, because he finds that they are of one mind with another. Our text states it as bluntly as this, ***“Be of one mind.”***

The Christians run in a rather special race, because they do not run against one another but with one another. In the end they all win. What makes the Christians of one mind most of all is their unity in the Word of God. There they find instructions as well as power to hold them together. When they were baptised, they were brought into union with the Triune God. They all have but one hope, that of being with God in the eternal mansions.

In a world that is filled with hate and confusion, where wars and rumours of wars are constantly a part of the daily news, where one man calls another a filthy name because his skin colour is different, where husband and wife, having started with the solemn vow to be one until death does them part, suddenly finds that all their hopes are blasted and love has turned cold and ugly — in this kind of world the Christian presses toward the goal, living in peace.

Not only does he personally live in peace, but he is a peacemaker, for he knows how wonderful the blessings are that come from peace.

The Bible compares the church to a household. It also likens it to a marriage in which Christ is the bridegroom and the church is the bride. So it is perfectly natural and normal that they greet and salute one another as being brothers and sisters in God’s great household, the holy Christian church. Our text states it in these words, ***“The God of love and peace shall be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints salute you.”***

These words served as a reminder to the Corinthians of the Christian fellowship they enjoyed with each other at Corinth and also of the wider fellowship of believers. As Paul writes from Macedonia, he sends the greetings

of all the brothers and sisters in the congregations in that area. The Corinthians do not stand alone.

Nor do Christians stand alone today, however isolated they may be. Luther once put it this way,⁵ *“Although they may be a thousand miles apart in body, they are yet an assembly in spirit because each one preaches, believes, hopes, loves, and lives like the other.”*

The concluding words of our text are a benediction. *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.* Paul closes all of his letters with a benediction. Here Paul summarises with one word the work of each person of the Trinity on our behalf. The word he uses to summarise the work of Jesus is *grace*. When Paul thinks of God the Father, the word *love* comes to mind. The word Paul uses to summarise the work of the Holy Spirit is *fellowship*.

The Holy Spirit is the one who brings us into fellowship with Jesus and through that into fellowship with one another.

What a great source of comfort and strength, as the end approaches, to experience the love of fellow Christians, greeting us and cheering us with a holy kiss that has its source and impulse in the love of God and peace!

With such gladness ringing in our hearts and the power of God supporting us in our weakness, we end the old church year with thanksgiving and begin the new one next Sunday with confidence. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Psa 19:5

² 1 Cor. 12: 9-10

³ Phil. 3:12-14

⁴ Phil. 4:13

⁵ E. M. Plass, *What Luther Says*, St. Louis: Concordia, 1991, No. 767, p 260